

LENA C. TAYLOR

Wisconsin State Senator • 4th District

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Senate Committee on Judiciary, Corrections, and Housing

Testimony of Senator Lena C. Taylor

Senate Bill 534 – Expungement of Misdemeanors

Thursday, March 6th, 2008

Honorable Colleagues,

Thank you for hearing testimony today on Senate Bill 534, a bill pertaining to expungement of misdemeanors. As the bill's Senate author, I am here, today, to speak on its behalf.

Our law already allows for expungement of misdemeanors in certain cases. For example, if the offender is under 21, the court can expunge records of the offense when the offender successfully completes his or her sentence. Alternatively, if the court determines at sentencing that expunging the record will benefit the person and will not harm society, it may expunge the record, effective immediately.

These provisions help mitigate the substantial barrier that a criminal record poses to success and productivity. Studies repeatedly show that a criminal record drastically reduces opportunities in areas like education, housing, and, especially, employment. Current laws permitting expungement reflect our collective desire to liberate these young men and women from the potentially lifelong burden imposed by a criminal record.

The effects of a criminal record, however, are not limited to the young. Men and women of all ages find themselves cut off from opportunities because of misdemeanor convictions from years, sometimes decades, earlier. Deprived of the means to support themselves or their families, they are all too often forced back into a life at the margins of society.

By extending existing expungement provisions to people of all ages, Senate Bill 534 offers hope to thousands of Wisconsinites looking to contribute in our communities. It shields them from the unfairly discriminatory treatment that results from a misdemeanor conviction. It gives them a second chance to contribute to their families, to society, and to our economy. Senate Bill 534 is both commonsensical and compassionate.

What Senate Bill 534 is not, however, is amnesty for criminals. It does not affect sentencing practices. It does not impede judges from leaving a misdemeanor conviction on the record. And it is narrowly tailored to exclude felons and dangerous criminals.

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Senate Bill 534 represents Wisconsin at its best: Pragmatic, caring, and committed to providing opportunity for all its citizens. It promises to benefit our families and our businesses. Therefore, I ask your support of Senate Bill 534.

Thank you.